

VZCZCXRO8335
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0941/01 0760640
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 170640Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0234
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 000941

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: TALK OF NEW IRAQI POLITICAL PARTY COALITIONS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 828
[B](#). BAGHDAD 842
[C](#). BAGHDAD 805
[D](#). BAGHDAD 790
[E](#). BAGHDAD 452
[F](#). BAGHDAD 863

Classified By: PolCouns Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary. Reports about negotiations among Iraqi political parties to break up the current sectarian blocs and form new alliances have intensified following secular nationalist Iraqiyya's March 1 announcement that it would withdraw from the GOI and Shia Fadhila's March 7 withdrawal from the Shia coalition. Those anxious to form new political blocs criticize the Maliki government for its alleged sectarianism and pro-Iran stance, and for failing to move forward on national reconciliation. They are also frustrated at their own marginalization. Some say they support the PM in implementing key benchmarks, while others seek to become a true opposition. Negotiations to form new coalitions have generally been instigated by parties with a relatively small number of Council of Representative (CoR) seats, and involve courting the Sunni Tawafuq alliance, independent Shia elements, and the Kurds. Despite similar policy prescriptions, so far none of the various efforts has come to fruition, and competing personal ambitions are one chief obstacle. End Summary.

Iraqiyya's Withdrawal an Empty Gesture

[2](#). (C) After a long absence, former PM and Iraqiyya party leader Ayad Allawi returned to Iraq in mid-February. Allawi briefed the Ambassador on his efforts to form a broad moderate coalition in the CoR shortly after his return. Allawi described his goal to form an issue-based, cross-sectarian, nationalist bloc and called for fast progress on political benchmarks to support the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP), including deBaathification reform, ridding Iraqi Security Forces and the police of militia infiltration, and dealing with pensions for Saddam's army and civil service. Allawi claimed that CoR speaker Mashadani was interested in joining his coalition, and that a variety of others were either on board or in negotiations to join. He listed the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), Sunni Hewan, Shia Fadhila, and elements of the Sadrists. Allawi said that according to SCIRI VP Abdel Medhi, the Dawa party was split on the issue.

[3](#). (C) Allawi claimed wide support in Arab capitals. He told the Ambassador he planned to hold a press conference February 25 to announce an 80-seat moderate coalition with the goal of rebalancing the Iraqi political arena along non-sectarian lines. Announcement of the National Salvation Front never materialized, but Allawi and Vice President and IIP leader Tariq al-Hashemi did hold a joint press conference acknowledge that they were engaged in discussions about

working together.

¶4. (C) On March 1, media reported that Allawi's cross-sectarian secular Iraqiyya (25 seats) was withdrawing from the GOI. Leading party member Adnan Pachachi made a public statement accusing the Maliki government of encouraging sectarianism and failing to make progress on key issue of national reconciliation.

¶5. (C) Allawi told the Ambassador March 2 that he had carefully crafted the statement, which read "the Iraqi List feels it will soon no longer be able to accept the responsibility of being in the government because of its sectarian domination and narrow-mindedness," to reflect an open-ended threat to pressure the PM to take action, but fall short of quitting the government. Despite the announcement, Iraqiyya's supposed withdrawal appears to be an empty gesture -- Allawi said he had no plans to withdraw his five ministers, adding that he was not really part of the government anyway, since Iraqiyya had been marginalized and given no role in GOI decision-making (Ref A).

Fadhila to Remain On Its Own...For Now

¶6. (C) On March 7 the 15-seat Shia Fadhila party announced it had pulled out of the Shia coalition. Fadhila bloc leader Hassan al-Shammari told Poloffs March 8 that the decision is final and not a ploy to win a ministry or vie for increased influence within the GOI (Ref B). Al-Shammari blamed sectarianism for Iraq's current crisis and said sectarian or ethnic-base coalitions "influenced by foreign countries" cannot solve Iraq's problems.

BAGHDAD 00000941 002 OF 004

¶7. (C) Al-Shammari reported that Fadhila's leaders, including its spiritual leader Ayatollah Yacoubi, had been planning this move for a while. He claimed Fadhila had no plans to join in forming any new coalitions and would remain an independent. (Comment: Despite al-Shammari's claim that the party will remain on its own, Fadhila comes up in every discussion among those trying to form new cross-sectarian alliances; it is just as likely that the newly independent party may be sitting back to weigh its options and determine how to negotiate the most influence. End Comment.)

¶8. (U) The Iraqiyya and Fadhila announcements spawned a series of contradictory press reports and political statements, such as Sunni Iraqi Accord Front (IAF) leader Adnan Dulaimi's announcement March 7 of the "Iraqi National Front," a new bloc including Iraqiyya, Salih al-Mutlaq's National Dialogue Council and Shia Fadhila.

Anti-Maliki Fronts

¶9. (C) When he spoke with the Ambassador, Allawi said he would support the Prime Minister, but complained that Maliki has allowed sectarian interests to stall progress on the BSP political goals necessary to establish lasting security. However, Allawi's professed support for Maliki flies in the face of Iraqiyya's withdrawal from the GOI, Allawi's constant public criticism of the PM, and his not-so-secret desire to replace Maliki as PM.

¶10. (C) Shortly before his return to Iraq for the first time since June 2006 to attend the March 12 opening CoR session, Sunni Hewan bloc leader Saleh Motlaq told Poloff he planned to create a new front (Ref C). Motlaq contended that the current sectarian-based governing system was not viable and therefore the CoR should vote to oust the Maliki government and replace it with competent, non-sectarian leaders. He said Hewan had been canvassing Iraqi politicians and found a

critical mass of support for this plan from a range of parties, including Fadhila, Iraqiyya, Tawafuq, and "other smaller groupings." Motlaq also claimed regional support for his initiative listing Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

¶11. (C) Motlaq considered the government positions offered by the Maliki government as too minor and has spent much time outside Iraq since the GOI was formed. Motlaq claimed that he and Allawi were in agreement on the idea of a cross sectarian, issue-based front, but that Allawi insisted on being its figurehead because of his ultimate aim to be the PM. Motlaq said he did not object to this in theory, but questioned the extent to which the former PM had enough popular support to win the seat.

Where the Sunnis Stand

¶12. (C) Sunnis may have arrived at the conclusion that joining cross-sectarian efforts will increase their influence. Senior IIP member Alaa Mekki told Poloffs that Fadhila has not agreed at this point to join any front with Sunni parties, although discussions continue. IIP CoR member Saleem Jabbouri said that Tawafuq is having conversations with Hewan to join together in a new bloc under a new name, but that Tawafuq did not trust Saleh Motlaq to act as a team player and therefore hesitated to include him in any coalition. VP Hashemi told Ambassador February 27 that Tawafuq is engaged in "good discussions" with Iraqiyya, as well as Hewan, the Turkomen Front, and Fadhila to form a national unity bloc. Some Sunnis say that Allawi's insistence on leading any new coalition and IIP's refusal to agree remains a stumbling block.

¶13. (C) IIP CoR member Ayad Sammaraie emphasized that the Iraqi National Front, prematurely announced by al-Dulaimi, "was not a project to bring down the government." He said that there were several major obstacles to an anti-Maliki bloc and argued that the Kurds and U.S. would have to agree for such a bloc to succeed. He pointed out that Fadhila has expressed a preference for operating independently in order to avoid criticism and was "political bloc shopping." Sammaraie added that it was clear that the U.S. was not supportive of a movement to oust Maliki. Sammaraie noted further that an effort to remove the Maliki government would create too much tension with the Shia coalition. Already, he said, Dawa contacts had approached IIP with worries that this front was conspiring to bring down the Shia-led government and that IIP had assured them this was not the case.

¶14. (C) On March 14, Sunni CoR Speaker Mashadani told

BAGHDAD 00000941 003 OF 004

PolCouns a deal was essentially done. Tawafuq, Salih al-Mutlaq, Iraqiyya, and Hewan were ready to cooperate and Fadhila was likely close to joining. The "structure" of the new coalition was simple, said Mashadani, comprising a roundtable of constituent group leaders and no overall "head." A spokesman may represent the group, which would seek practical cooperation without a designated leader.

A Front Reaching Out to Insurgents

¶15. (C) Fadhila member Nadim al-Jabiri briefed PolCouns February 8 on his effort to form a "national front" to solve Iraqi's political crisis and confront Iranian influence (Ref E). He claimed he has support from all Sunni leaders including VP Tariq al-Hashemi, CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani, Khalaf al-Ulayan, Adnan al-Dulaimi, and Saleh Motlaq. He also claimed that all leaders of the insurgency except AQI were behind the national front effort, along with Arab states and Turkey. On the Shia side al-Jabiri said Fadhila was on

board and negotiations with the Sadrists were in advanced stages. Al-Jabiri added, apologetically, that in order to gain support of the insurgency the plan called for withdrawal of coalition forces, "although not immediately." Nevertheless, he insisted, the national front and the U.S. have the same goals for the future of Iraq.

¶16. (C) It was never clear that al-Jabiri had the support of, or represented, his Fadhila party in conducting these discussions. Fadhila may indeed be talking about this, as it seems to be on other front efforts as well, but according to Fadhila leader al-Shammari, the official party line is that Fadhila will remain independent for the time being.

Pro-Maliki Fronts

¶17. (C) In 2006 the Embassy engaged in an effort to assist formation of a moderate front of SCIRI, Sunni IIP, and the Kurds to support the GOI to enact key legislation and isolate extremists. Currently this effort remains deadlocked over several obstacles, including PM Maliki's suspicions that the front would usurp his power while increasing SCIRI's, disagreement over the front's structure and function, and the Shia coalition's unwillingness to openly isolate the Sadrists. Although unable to come to a formal agreement, as powerful blocs within the national unity government, there is no reason these groups cannot work together in a 'virtual front' in support of the GOI.

¶18. (C) PolCouns met with former Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Speaker and BSP Political Committee member Hajim al-Hassani March 7. Al-Hassani spoke of the need to bolster PM Maliki to ensure success of the BSP and its political component. He outlined his own plan for changing the Iraqi political arena by breaking up the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish blocs to form a new coalition of Dawa, IIP, KDP, and Fadhila in support of PM Maliki. Such an alignment, he contended, would comprise 142 CoR seats, thereby allowing Maliki to succeed in pushing through key political benchmarks.

¶19. (C) The leader of the tiny 5-seat Solidarity Front, Shia independent CoR member Qassem Daoud, told PolCouns March 13 that in order to build on the positive momentum of initial BSP successes what was required was a solid pro-Maliki front. The GOI and the CoR are weak, he said, and Maliki does not have the support of all factions of the national unity government, or even of all of his own Dawa party.

Where Do the Kurds Fit In?

¶20. (C) With 55 CoR seats, the Kurds would be the key members of any significant political coalition. Without the Kurds, no proposed new coalition has a serious chance of success. PM Maliki understands this well, as evidenced by his nervousness about an early March meeting between Allawi and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani. We can only speculate about what effect Allawi and Barzani's back-to-back visits to Saudi Arabia later in March had on the PM.

¶21. (C) Although Kurdish leaders proved willing to talk to Iraqiyya about the possibility of working together on particular issues, there are currently no indications that President Talabani's PUK or Barzani's KDP are thinking seriously about abandoning the national unity government. Barzani spoke at length with Allawi and Pachachi March 2 and 3 about cooperating together in the CoR on issues of common interests, but offering only support of a deBaathification

BAGHDAD 00000941 004 OF 004

reform law.

¶22. (C) Barham Salih brainstormed March 4 in Dukan with Allawi and Pachachi, agreeing in particular on their shared concerns about Iranian influence. Pointing a finger at Iraqiyya, Salih said the Iraqi liberal agenda was weak and could not prevail unless it joined with the Kurds and Sunnis. But convincing the Kurds to break their alliance with the UIA would require agreement to Kurdish designs on Kirkuk, to which he assessed Tawafuq would never agree (ref F). Sunni leader Saleh Motlaq took the same position with Poloff, arguing that the Kurds would be necessary to form a new cross-sectarian bloc, but said that Kurdish territorial ambitions were problematic (Ref C).

¶23. (C) In an apparent backlash against reports that new coalitions were imminent, on March 14 spokesman for the Kurdish Coalition Firyad Rawandouzi criticized the "Iraqi Lists maneuvers" to form a new political bloc in an attempt to bring down the Maliki government. And on March 10 Kurdish CoR member Adnan al-Mufti reaffirmed that the Kurdish MPs will maintain its alliance with the UIA saying, "we insist on keeping this relationship."

Comment: New Bloc Efforts Look a Lot Alike

¶24. (C) These many attempts to form new political fronts are remarkably similar. All call for progress on issues of political reconciliation that mirror the actions Maliki promised would accompany the BSP. All involve almost identical casts of characters. All complain they are marginalized and accuse the GOI of behaving as a sectarian majority, not a national unity government. All say they aim to break up the three sect-based blocs in favor of non-sectarian, issue-based alliances. Proponents for new coalitions are not against the GOI's political program, but fed up with what they view as Maliki's inability to implement it.

¶25. (C) Despite similar policy prescriptions, conflicting personal ambitions remain the chief obstacle to new coalitions. No GOI party is willing to give up its ministerial posts. Allawi continues to insist on his own leadership. Former Speaker al-Hassani, who promotes an almost identical agenda, is also motivated by an interest in regaining his former position or in getting a ministry in a much-anticipated cabinet reshuffle. Until the politicians driving the discussion of cross-sectarian fronts can put the political reconciliation objectives above their ambitions and get serious about developing practical plans for success, efforts to build an effective cross-sectarian front are unlikely to succeed. End Comment.
SPECKHARD